

ANCIENT MYTHS OF CYPRUS

Erasmus+



The legend of the
Five Finger
Mountains

Digenis Akritas was the bravest of all Akrites (=border guards) who guarded the borders of Byzantium. He was the terror of the Saracens in the mountains of Asia Minor. One day he was persecuting there a brave Saracen, who was defeated many times in past fights by Digenis. Saracen then decided to leave Asia Minor when he realized he could not escape from his hands. He got into a boat and headed for Cyprus. Digenis saw him in the middle of the sea and decided to hunt him in Cyprus.

The Saracen arrived in the shores of Kyrenia (North Cyprus) and proceeded in Kythrea in order to stride over the plain of Mesaoria and reach in Famagusta to get into another boat in order to go to Syria. These way Digenis would lose his tracks.

Paphos, the daughter of Pygmalion and Galatea, married a Syrian, the Sandoko, who lived in Cyprus at that time, but built their home in Cilicia and there acquired their sons, Kinyras. Eventually, Cilicia was hit by famine. Kinyras and his friends set sail in the hope to find a more fertile area so they arrived at the island of Cyprus, on the coast where Aphrodite emerged. Happy with the land they found, they built a city and named Paphos (his mother) and in the center they built the temple of Venus because they believed that she led them in her hometown. Kinyras was the first king of the prosperous and peaceful Paphos according to mythology.



Kinyras the
founder of the
city of Paphos



Rock of Digenis -
Petra tou Romiou

Aphrodite was born in Cyprus, well not born exactly because as the story goes, she was "foam born". Her father in a manner of speaking was Uranus (Father Heaven). In fact her conception was caused by her half-brother Cronos. He was a son of Uranus and Gaea (Mother Earth) and at his mother's instigation had castrated his father with a sickle. The resultant blood that dripped from his severed organ (as it was carried off on the shoulder of Cronos) created a race of giants, the nymphs and the furies, as they landed in the sea, white foam was created from the friction of water and flesh. This foam formed the shape of a beautiful woman when it came to the island of Cyprus. When Aphrodite stepped on the ground, beautiful flowers blossomed, anemones and bonnets, which to this day still bloom on the rocks in Paphos. She has also been called "Godess of love" "Cytherea," " Cypris," " Cypria," and "the Cypriate". Since then, Cyprus became the favorite island for the goddess of love. where she preferred to spend all of her time.

Adonis looked and behaved like an immortal. He was the lover of Aphrodite, just like Ares (the god of war). Being jealous, Ares turned himself into a wild boar and terrorized the district of Paphos, killing the inhabitants with such brutality that news of this boar spread all around the island. Adonis being a hunter ignored Aphrodite's warnings against hunting wild animals and set out to stop the beast from killing his countrymen.

Ares, as a wild boar, awaited Adonis and ran so fast that he gathered dust around him, blinding the young boy. The boar then attacked, wounding Adonis and left without trying to help the hunter. Aphrodite heard his dying groans and rushed to the scene only to arrive too late. Aphrodite hurried to Adonis in her chariot, but his soul had already descended into the Underworld. In despair, she sprinkled nectar on Adonis' wounds. As Aphrodite bore her lover's body out of the woods, crimson anemones sprung up where each drop of blood and nectar fell onto the earth. It is said that that the wind which blows the blossoms open, will soon afterwards blow the petals away; so it is called the Anemone, or Wind Flower, for that which brings forth its life, ends it.

Aphrodite was overcome with grief and eventually begged Zeus for the return of her lover.



Adonis and the anemone -
wind flower



Commandaria

Is a sweet dessert wine made in the Commandaria region of Cyprus on the foothills of the Troodos Mountains. Is made from sun-dried grapes named Xynisteri and black grapes and through its production method it often reaches high alcohol levels, already before fortification. It represents an ancient wine style documented in Cyprus back to 800 BC and has the distinction of being the world's oldest named wine still in production, with the name Commandaria dating back to the crusades in the 12th century. The wine has a rich history, said to date back to the time of the ancient Greeks, where it was a popular drink at festivals. A dried grape wine from Cyprus was first known to be described in 800 BC by the Greek poet Hesiod and was known, by much later, as the Cypriot Manna. The history of the Cyprus wine is mingled with the worship of Aphrodite,

Pygmalion who lived at Amathus was dedicated to his work as a sculptor and was not interested in women. Aphrodite took pity in him and took the form of the most beautiful woman and appeared before him in a dream. When Pygmalion awoke, he recalled his dream and set out to carve this lovely creature. He created a statue made of ivory and fell in love with it, to the extent that he would talk to it and gathered flowers for it.

On the day of Aphrodite's festival at Amathus, Pygmalion took with him an offering of great value and prayed that his statue be given life. Aphrodite was moved and helped him by granting him his favor.

When he returned home, Pygmalion found the statue was alive, named her Galatea and asked her to be his wife. Galatea accepted and nine months later they had a daughter



Pygmalion and Galatea - The birth of Paphos



RIGAINA

Rigaina (=queen) is the most known and mysterious person of the legends and traditions of Cyprus. She is associated with kings, warriors, with Digenis Akritas, and other mysterious persons. With no doubt, the name rigaina is medieval. In this period Cyprus was a Frankish kingdom, so it had rigades and rigaines (which means, kings and queens). The characteristic of this famous Cyprus' Rigainas vary; sometimes she is good-hearted, sometimes she is cruel and revengeful, and sometime militant campaigner, once again weak and defenseless, usually resides in high peaks or withdrawn in remote caves. But she is always beautiful, proud and inscrutable. She hasn't got a name. They all know her as Rigaina, the queen. Normally she is very rich and has hidden treasures that many have tried before to find them but in vain. The mythological locations related to Rigaina are numerous and all over Cyprus.

1) On the hill Heron Athalassa, near Nicosia, the tradition wants the palace of Rigaina. The plain around belonged to Rigaina. Narrated that once, at the time of harvest, Rigaina informed that the enemies arrived. She then pleased God to transform their heaps of cereal in soil and stones in order that the enemies could not to find them. The stoned wheat is still there at the road to Larnaca.

2) In Akamas with had also built a palace. Digging the valley bearing her name. She was there for holidays, says the legend.

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Aphrodite was overcome with grief and eventually begged Zeus for the return of her lover. Zeus promised to ask Persephone, the queen of the underworld, only to realize that she also had fallen in love with the young boy and would not let him go. Zeus therefore decided that Adonis could live where he pleased for four months, provided he divided the rest of his time between the two goddesses. Adonis chose to live four months with Persephone and eight with Aphrodite.

In Pafos, the annual festival 'Adonia' was held on the 25th and 26th of March,



Adonis and the anemone - wind flower





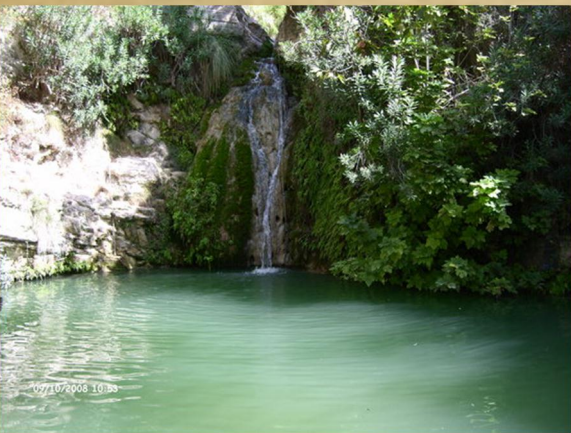
The "Baths of Aphrodite"

Is an area in the Akamas peninsula between Polis and Cape Arnaouti. It derived its name from a small grotto shaded by an old fig tree, in the waters of which, legend has it, the goddess Aphrodite used to bathe. According to mythology, this is where she met her lover Adonis.

Kinyras, the mythical king of Pafos and High Priest of the Temple of Aphrodite had a daughter called Smyrna. She was such a beautiful girl that dared to provoke the goddess of love, Venus. The goddess was enraged and wanted to avenge. So Venus breathed in her lust for her own father, Kinyras and, knowing that he was in love with her, transformed Smyrna so that she would look like her. Kinyras was unable to recognize his daughter and made love with her. Smyrna became pregnant from this mating. When Kinyras realized what had happened he was outraged and wanted to punish his daughter and chased her with a sword to kill her. But the last moment Venus intervened and transformed the unfortunate girl in the homonymous fragrant plant. The sword of Kinyras decapitated



SMYRNA



Adonis Baths

Cyprus is also connected to the love story of Adonis and Aphrodite. Adonis Baths located in Kili Paphos, is one of the most beautiful and unique areas in Cyprus. Tradition says that Adonis the God of Beauty tended his horses in this place and hunted in the Akamas forest.

Popular tradition connects Adonis Baths with the legendary visit of Digenis Akritas. The story says that he put one foot on each side of the River Mavrokolymbos and drank water from the baths. Until this day there is a place called Digenis feet.

Tourists visiting this fabulous peninsula, pay a special visit to the popular Baths of Aphrodite. According to the myth, Adonis drank water from the lagoon and this is how he fell in love with Aphrodite (Venus). In Homeric legend, the founder of Salamis, Teucer, was the son of King Telamon and his wife Hesione, who was the daughter of King Laomedon of Troy. This lineage made Teucer the cousin of the legendary Hector and Paris of Troy, but Teucer fought against all of them, as he was an opponent of Troy in the Trojan War. It is said Teucer fought in the War as an archer, but his shots at Hector were deflected by Apollo. At one point Hector threw a large rock at Teucer, injuring him. While his injury prevented him from fighting for a time, he was said to be one of the individuals who invaded Troy in the Trojan horse. Teucer's half-brother, Ajax committed suicide, for which King Telamon disowned Teucer, leading him to flee to Cyprus, where he founded Salamis. The ancient city originates back to 1100 BC - after the Trojan War - when Salamis was the capital of Cyprus. Being buried beneath sand for more than a thousand years saved Salamis from destruction. Coins discovered from the Middle Ages around the city's basilica indicate there



Baths of Aphrodite

Salamis



Myths and Legends of the Akamas

The Akamas peninsula, located in the north-western part of Cyprus, in 48 kilometers from Paphos, is associated with many ancient legends and mythological subjects.

This unique nature reserve, created by nature itself, at the first acquaintance is amazing: it seems that nowhere has more clean air, so blindingly bright sun and crystal clear water of mountain streams. Maybe because of the rare beauty of flowers and herbs, preserved only in Akamas, and once it grows all over Cyprus, the legendary Homer called it - "the fragrant island flowers."

The ancient history of the peninsula is closely linked to Greek mythology. For example, the myth telling of Theseus, the winning Cretan monster - the Minotaur with the help of the king's daughter Ariadne, in one of his heavily modified variants that takes us to Cyprus.

The ship on which Theseus escaped from Crete with his beloved Ariadne and her sister Phaedra along with persons rescued from the monster came to the shores of Cyprus after a terrible storm. Here the hero was forced to leave Ariadne, who was expecting a child and could not continue with all the swimming. After some time Theseus returned to her and bitterly learned that Ariadne died during childbirth.

Returning to his native Athens, where he was a king, Theseus married the sister of Ariadne, who gave him two sons. Many years later, one of them - Akamas, famous for his strength and agility, succeeded Theseus on the throne. After the abduction of Helen by Paris- son of the Trojan king- Akamas was sent to Troy to demand among other Greeks the return of Helen to her husband. There the Trojan princess Laodike fell in love with Akamas and soon bore him a son. Unable to return to his hometown because of the connection with Laodike which was not interrupted during the siege of Troy, Akamas was